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BURMA:

Regime Again Cracking Down on Dissent

Violent confrontations between the regime and unarmed civilians are likely in Rangoon as the anniversary of the 18 September 1988 military takeover nears and the military government continues to resist transferring power to the newly elected Constituent Assembly.

The regime has increased its military presence in Rangoon, adding two infantry battalions over the past few weeks.

the military is arresting large numbers of students. The regime last week also arrested nine NLD officials, including the party's de facto leader and spokesman, Kyi Maung, and its second-ranking official, Chit Khine. The arrests follow a letter from the regime to NLD party leaders hinting that under martial law the military has the power to close down any opposition organization.

Comment: Demonstrations and rallies by students, monks, and other oppositionists protesting the arrest and the regime's stalling on turning over power are likely to increase over the next few weeks. The NLD has threatened to convene a national assembly on 30 September unless the regime has opened a formal dialogue with the party. The arrests of NLD leaders will hurt the party and may help militant members press their demands for confronting the regime.

The military probably will quickly and violently suppress protests by the unarmed civilians. The government is likely to justify retaining power by arguing that a civilian government for now would be unable to prevent chaos.

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